On the Types of *Sporophila albitorquis* (Sharpe)

by Allan R. Phillips

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Sharpe (1888: 120) proposed a new species *Spermophila albitorquis*, distinguished from *S. torqueola* only "by a white collar round the hind neck. Total length 4.4 inches, culmen 0.35, wing 2.25, tail 1.85, tarsus 0.6." Two specimens were listed, "♂ ad." skins in the British Museum (Natural History) from *a.* "Mexico. Sclater Coll." and *b.* "Capulalpam, S. Mexico, Oct. 1860 (*A. Salle*). Salvin-Godman Coll." The latter had already been described (as *S. torqueola*) by Salvin & Godman (1885: 352), who gave its measurements as "Long. tota 4.2, alæ 2.2, caudæ 2.0, tarsi 0.56;" they indicated Boucard as the actual collector and Oaxaca as the state. They also referred to an earlier mention of the bird by Sclater.

The supposed species attracted little attention until van Rossem (1934: 422) investigated its status. He wrote that "Number 85.2.10.121 . . . is ticketed as the type of this supposed species. It bears two tags, one a Sclater Museum label which reads 'Mexico Warwick' and on the reverse '625b of Cat./ 85.2.10.121'. The type tag bears the same data . . . Though not marked as to sex, the bird is an adult ♂ in fresh plumage. Sharpe's original description . . . lists two birds, specimen 'a' as above and specimen 'b' from Chapulapam [Oaxaca]. Neither was designated as the type. I could not find specimen 'b' . . . My own measurements of the single ♂ cited above accord closely with Sharpe's . . . I measure: wing, 57.0; tail, 48.0; exposed culmen, 9.1; tarsus, 14.8." He thought *albitorquis* probably "an intergrade much closer to *torqueola* than to *mutanda*" and suggested it be synonymized with *torqueola*. Hellmayr (1938: 186) gave the name as *albitorques* and wrote: "type in British Museum examined . . . Like van Rossem, I cannot see in the type of *S. albitorques* anything but an individual variant of *torqueola*."

Both of Sharpe's specimens, however, are still in the British Museum, and preference must be given to "*b.*" for the following reasons: (1) It is the only one with any data; (2) It is the only subadult ♂, and in the best plumage; "*a.*", *contra* van Rossem, has the pale fuscous or brownish wings and tail of an immature, and its primaries show considerable wear; and, most conclusively; (3) it is the only one (again *contra* van Rossem) which fully agrees with Sharpe's measurements. In these tiny seed-eaters, variation in standard measurements is minimal; my own are 54.0 and 54.6 for the wing (chord) of *a.* and 56.0 mm for *b.*, and for the tail 48.5 for *a.* and 49.3 mm for *b.* Only in total length do the two differ significantly: Warwick's skin, *a.*, is stretched out and measures 120 mm or slightly over 4.7 inches, *vs.* 108 or nearly 4.3 for Boucard's (*b.*) which is thus much closer to Sharpe's "4.4 inches". I therefore select as lectotype specimen *b.*, now British Museum (Natural History) number 85.12.14.402.

Parenthetically, this type is somewhat duller on the rump, sides, and flanks than fresh-plumaged specimens from Atlixco, Puebla, and farther west, and paler than most. It may represent a recognizable Oaxaca race. The other cotype appears to me, as to van Rossem and Hellmayr, to be ordinary *torqueola* in general colouration.

References:

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An aberrant *Lamprotornis mevesii* with comments on the limits of the genus *Lamprotornis*

by R. K. Brooke

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The Instituto de Investigacao Cientifica de Angola in Sa da Bandeira has a female specimen (no. 27466) in moderately worn plumage of *Lamprotornis mevesii mevesii* (Wahlberg) collected by E. Pantes on 20th May 1969 at Cauaiala in the Huila district of Angola. It is entirely grey save for a slight purplish blue gloss, chiefly on the rectrices and remiges. The soft parts are nearly as dark as in normal birds. This aberrant specimen looks like a large, dark edition of *Cosmopsarus unicolor* Shelley of East Africa, though in that species the slight gloss on the remiges and rectrices is green, not bluish purple. Normal birds are highly iridescent blue and purple with a little bronze. The aberration is presumably due to a thickening of the translucent cells above the pigments, together with a reduction in the volume of melanin deposited. The thickening of the translucent cells would have the effect of reducing or eliminating the normal iridescence depending on the extent of the thickening.

If a simple genetic aberration can produce a bird looking like a member of another genus the question of the validity of separate genera arises. *Cosmopsarus* Reichenow 1879 with type species *C. regius* Reichenow is recognized by Amadon (1962), but White (1962) lumps it in *Spreo* Lesson 1831 with type species *S. bicolor* (Gmelin). But as pointed out by Clancey (1958) *Spreo* as constituted by either Amadon or White is a composite group. Shelley (1906) seems to regard the lack of dark undertail coverts in adults as the only generic character separating *Spreo* from *Lamprotornis* Temminck 1820 with type species *L. caudatus* (P. L. S. Mueller), and Amadon (1943) gives no very clear reason for recognizing *Spreo* except convenience. Benson (1959) recorded a male *L. chloropterus elizabeth* (Stresemann) in full breeding condition but with juvenile chestnut on the abdomen from Lochinvar in Zambia, and I have seen such birds in the early part of the breeding season in northern Rhodesia. These observations hardly suggest that we are dealing with a character of generic importance. Durrer & Villiger (1970) show that *Lamprotornis*, *Cosmopsarus* and *Spreo* have the same iridescence structure, and differ substantially therein from other genera of African starlings. By *Spreo* they mean *S. superbus* (Rueppell) and its relatives, not the restricted genus of Clancey (1958).

The similarities in plumage and structure at both macro and micro levels leads me to believe that two genera should be recognized: *Spreo* including *bicolor*, *albicapillus* Blyth and *fischeri* (Reichenow) as proposed by Clancey (1958), and *Lamprotornis* including the species placed therein by White (1962) and Amadon (1962), plus *hildebrandti* (Cabanis), *pulcher* (P. L. S. Mueller), *regius* (Reichenow), *shelleyi* Sharpe, *superbus* and *unicolor* (Shelley), and I propose accordingly.

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